



# Deliverable 1.5 (M56)

Title

## D1.5 – Final Evaluation of the Access given – M56

*Version 1*

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## 1. Objective

The deliverable describes the third and final assessment of AQUAEXCEL 3.0 (AE3) access, comprising feedback from all parties involved in the procedures, including users, TNA managers, and reviewers. The assessment will enable us to understand to what extent previous criticisms and suggestions have been incorporated into the procedures and may benefit the new AQUASERV project, which encompasses 90% of the AE3 partnership.

## 2. Background

One of the primary objectives of AE3 was to provide scientific services by offering access to the aquaculture facilities of its partner institutes. AE3 offered a permanently open call with intermittent evaluations. The ARIA platform handles the applications' submission, evaluation, and communication. Internal and external reviewers evaluated each application. TNA managers at each facility assess whether projects can proceed and provide support to users during their visits. Each application is expected to take up to 3 months until a decision. After the completion of TNA, users and hosts provide feedback.

The present deliverable was planned to provide an overall assessment of the TNA procedure. The analysis is based on feedback aided by questionnaires sent to users, reviewers, and TNA managers.

## 3. Methodology

Questionnaires with questions explicitly addressed to the targets – users, reviewers, and TNA managers - were prepared on Microsoft Forms (see annex). A hyperlink to the questionnaire was sent via email to users (148 approved projects, 26 not approved), reviewers (64), and TNA managers (15).

## 4. Results

The respondents to the questionnaire were 48 users (43 approved and 5 not approved projects), 9 TNA managers, and 13 reviewers.

### 4.1. User feedback

#### 4.1.1. Communication

Most users (85.4%) found out about the AE3 TNA call through colleagues, their supervisor (8.3%), the European Aquaculture Society's dissemination (2.1%), others from the AE3 website (2.1%), and the AE3 newsletter (2.1%).

#### 4.1.2. Clarity of information about TNA facilities available

All but three users (94%) found it was easy to decide which facility to choose.

#### **4.1.3. Rating the information provided and how to apply during the pre-application process**

Most respondents (81%) considered the information made available before the application very good or excellent, which in most cases also entailed contacting the TNA manager (4.5 out of 5, where 5 is the maximum). Two (4.1%) considered the information satisfactory (score 3), and two (4.1%) considered it poor (score 2). Five did not read the information provided (10.4%).

#### **4.1.4. The role of the TNA managers**

Only four respondents did not contact the TNA managers (8%). Those who contacted the TNA manager considered the interaction very important (5) or important (4) to prepare the application (4.7 out of 5, where 5 is the maximum).

#### **4.1.5. Use of the Orientation Committee**

Five users (10.4%) contacted the Orientation Committee for support in preparing their application. However, fourteen (29%) also did not know what it was.

#### **4.1.6. Decision about which facility to use**

At the top of the list for choosing a facility is the “quality of research facilities” (65%), followed by “collaboration with local researchers” (50%). However, when two factors are considered, “collaboration with local researchers” becomes more important (41% of factors mentioned), “quality of research facilities” (31%), “technical support” (20%) and “state-of-the-art instrumentation” (11.3%). Other factors, such as the clarity of services offered, feedback during the application preparation process, facility size, and distance from home, were mentioned by less than 2% of respondents each.

#### **4.1.7. Description of services of chosen facility**

Most respondents (96%) found the description of services by the facility of their choice clearly described.

#### **4.1.8. About ARIA, the application platform**

Only fourteen respondents (33%) were familiar with ARIA. The users considered the practical information provided during registration and application through ARIA to be good to very good (3.9 out of 5, where 5 is the maximum; n = 48). Of these four respondents (8%), it was considered unsatisfactory (score 1 or 2). Overall, the users considered the ARIA system good (score 3.8 of 5, where 5 is the maximum). Four respondents (8%) considered the ARIA system unsatisfactory or poor, and 12 (25%) indicated a need for further assistance with ARIA.

#### **4.1.9. Feedback statement from reviewers**

The level of satisfaction with feedback from reviewers among users who had projects approved was very high (score 4.5 out of 5, n=43), while it was much lower (score 3 out of 5; n=5) among those who did not have their project approved (two considered it very poor).

#### **4.1.10. Overall reviewing process**

The applicants who had their projects approved were highly satisfied with the overall review process (score 4.4 out of 5, where 5 is the maximum; n = 43). In contrast, those who did not have their projects approved were not satisfied (score 2.6 out of 5; n = 5).

#### **4.1.11. The usefulness of the information provided by the TNA host after the project was accepted**

The respondents considered the information provided by the TNA host to be very good or excellent (score 4.7 out of 5; n = 43).

#### **4.1.12. Satisfaction with TNA application and selection**

The applicants who had their projects accepted were highly satisfied with the application procedure (average score 4.7 out of 5). In contrast, those who did not have their projects approved were significantly less satisfied (score 3 out of 5; n = 5). However, among the latter opinions, there was an equal division between those who were very poor (score 1) and those who were very satisfied (score 5).

Eighty per cent of users achieved their objectives fully, 14% achieved partial objectives, and only one user (out of 43) did not achieve the initial objective. Two others still had not carried out access. Reasons for not achieving objectives varied, including difficulties with equipment, experimentation with live animals, a need for more time, a lack of training to perform the experiments, or the requirement for publication only.

Suggestions including improvements in AE3 website navigation, listing implemented projects on the AE3 website for future reference, faster feedback, more intuitive ARIA, reducing the time for reimbursement, better communication between access managers and applicants, better accommodation, and a short time to carry out the project, which allows only the preliminary data to be obtained.

### **4.2. TNA managers' feedback**

#### **4.2.1. Communication**

Most TNA managers (80%) were very satisfied with the visibility of their facility (average 4.2 out of 5; n=9). Two-thirds consider AE3 well promoted, and twenty per cent suggest dissemination through conferences and videos – all of which have been done.

#### **4.2.2. Suggestions to improve the selection procedure**

Suggestions ordered according to priority: reduce the duration of the evaluation procedure (3 mentions), improve ARIA, including the option for TNA managers to request revisions of applications (1 mention), and reduce bureaucracy after TNA (1 mention).

#### **4.2.3. Main challenges/suggestions when hosting TNA**

The main challenges, according to priority, were: ARIA functionality (2 mentions), Difficulty of communication between TNA managers and users (bypassed by direct contact with scientists, 2 mentions), and users following ethical rules (1 mention).

#### **4.2.4. Satisfaction with the impact of TNA on the facility**

Most TNA managers were highly satisfied with the impact of TNA on their facility (average score 4.4 out of 5; n=9), with only one manager being dissatisfied (score 2). The TNA managers considered TNAs to have (78%) or possibly (22%) stimulated new research, collaborations or increased

networking of the facility. Indeed, all TNA managers considered TNAs provided new opportunities for collaboration (5 mentions), networking (2 mentions), showing capacities (2 mentions) and an opportunity to improve internal procedures (1 mention).

### 4.3. Reviewers' feedback

#### 4.3.1. Adequacy of information in TNA for evaluation

The reviewers were generally satisfied with the information requested from the applicants for evaluation (score 3.8 out of 5; n=13). They also highly rate the guidance and scoring system provided (score 4.3 out of 5) and the administration of the TNA procedure (average 3.9 out of 5).

#### 4.3.2. Satisfaction with the overall reviewing and suggestions

The reviewers consider the overall reviewing process very good (average 4.2 out of 5). They also make suggestions for improvement, including: reviewers receiving notification of the outcome of the evaluation (1 mention); improvements in the ARIA system (user-friendly interface, communication through ARIA instead of e-mail; 1 mention), more frequent reminders, alignment of the submission form with the evaluation criteria), better information about the host (1 mention).

## 5. Conclusion

This survey found significant improvements in several areas of the TNA procedure, with several factors previously scored 3 and 4 now being scored 4 and 5. Of particular note are the recognised improvements in the ARIA system, which is central to managing the TNA.

Despite numerous improvements in communication, including the use of facility videos and multiple forms of disseminating information about the available calls and services, users overwhelmingly report that they found out about the AE3 TNA calls through word of mouth. This does not mean that our dissemination was ineffective, as it reached those who informed the users; however, it suggests that there may be channels of communication that have not been fully explored.

Users considered the information made available to be of high quality, indicating that the measures taken, including the addition of short videos describing the facilities and helping with procedures, were effective. It is clear that the choice of facilities was largely based on the reputation (perceived quality) of the facilities and collaboration with technical support and instrumentation, as the next (distant) factors in the choice.

Notably, the general level of satisfaction with the reviewing process is high, with the exception of a few (2) users whose proposals were not approved, a factor that may have influenced their response. Additionally, the vast majority of users achieved their objectives fully, underscoring the high quality of the service provided. Although improvements in the ARIA system are evident from the higher scores received compared to previous surveys, a certain level of relative dissatisfaction remains (25%), as supported by suggestions for improvement.

As in the previous survey, the TNA managers' general satisfaction level is high, justified by the start of new collaborations and increased visibility of their facilities. Some of the previous criticisms have been addressed, with suggestions for improvement by the TNA managers now focusing on

enhancing communication and direct interaction with applicants through the ARIA system, rather than email.

Finally, Reviewers continue to consider the reviewing procedure very good to excellent and continue to make suggestions for a more versatile ARIA system.

In conclusion, by considering the opinions of all parties involved in the TNA procedure, there has been a continued improvement in internal procedures throughout AE3, which in turn translates into increased levels of satisfaction. The experience and best practices acquired will be invaluable to offer a high level of service in Horizon INFRASERV projects, such as AQUASERV, which follow on from AE3.

## 6. Appendix

### 6.1. User feedback

AQUAEXCEL 3.0: user feedback on TNA experience and recommendations for improvement  
This is to obtain feedback and ideas for improvement after the initial calls for transnational access.  
**Users with not accepted projects or TNA still to be done**

- 1) How did you find out about Aquaexcel 3.0 transnational access (TNA) calls?
- 2) Was it easy to decide which TNA facility to choose to develop your project? If No, why Not?
- 3) How do you rate the practical information provided on how to apply for TNA during the pre-application process i.e., contacts with TNA managers with the proposal plans? (1 not useful-5 excellent, 6-did not read it)
- 4) At the stage of planning your TNA application were you in touch with the TNA manager of the facility you intended to apply?
- 5) If yes, how important was this interaction to prepare your application 1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 6) Did you use the Orientation Committee?
- 7) What 3 most important factors weighed more on your decision to choose a TNA facility
- 8) Which TNA facility did you choose?
- 9) Did you find the information about the services offered clear? If no, what would help?
- 10) ARIA is the online application system used in Aquaexcel 3.0. Were you familiar with the use of ARIA?
- 11) How do you rate the practical information provided on registering and applying through ARIA? (1 not useful-5 excellent)
- 12) How user-friendly is ARIA? (1 not friendly-5 excellent)
- 13) Do you need help/further help in the use of ARIA?
- 14) Feedback - How useful was the reviewers feedback? (1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 15) How happy were you with the overall reviewing process? (1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 16) How do you rate your satisfaction with the general TNA application and selection process? (1 not satisfied -5 very satisfied)
- 17) Please provide up to 3 proposals for improvement, if considered relevant
- 18) Any other comments (positive or negative)?
- 19) Name (optional)

20) E-mail (optional)

**Users with accepted projects or TNA done**

- 1) How did you find out about Aquaexcel 3.0 transnational access (TNA) calls? If previous answer was "Other" where?
- 2) Was it easy to decide which TNA facility to choose to develop your project? If No, why Not?
- 3) How do you rate the practical information provided on how to apply for TNA during the pre-application process i.e., contacts with TNA managers with the proposal plans? (1 not useful-5 excellent, 6-did not read it)
- 4) At the stage of planning your TNA application were you in touch with the TNA manager of the facility you intended to apply? If yes, how important was this interaction to prepare your application 1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 5) Did you use the Orientation Committee?
- 6) What 3 most important factors weighed more on your decision to choose a TNA facility
- 7) Which TNA facility did you choose?
- 8) Did you find the information about the services offered clear? If no, what would help?
- 9) ARIA is the online application system used in Aquaexcel 3.0. Were you familiar with the use of ARIA?
- 10) How do you rate the practical information provided on registering and applying through ARIA? (1 not useful-5 excellent)
- 11) How user-friendly is ARIA? (1 not friendly-5 excellent)
- 12) Do you need help/further help in the use of ARIA?
- 13) How useful was the reviewers feedback? (1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 14) How happy were you with the overall reviewing process? (1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 15) Once your project was accepted, how adequate was the information provided by the host TNA on how to use the facility? (1 poor-5 excellent 6 - Not applicable yet)
- 16) How do you rate your satisfaction with the general TNA application and selection process? (1 not satisfied -5 very satisfied)
- 17) Did you achieve the planned objectives? If no, can you indicate succinctly the reasons
- 18) Please provide up to 3 proposals for improvement, if considered relevant
- 19) Any other comments (positive or negative)?
- 20) Name (optional)
- 21) E-mail (optional)

## 6.2. TNA manager feedback

Aquaexcel 3.0: TNA experience and recommendations for improvement (TNA managers). This is to obtain feedback and ideas for improvement from TNA managers after the initial calls for transnational access

- 1) Are you satisfied with the visibility of your TNA facilities and services through Aquaexcel 3? (1 not satisfied-5 excellent)
- 2) How could TNA be better promoted?
- 3) Which additional networks could be used to promote dissemination (e.g., EurOcean, JPI Oceans, ICES, others...)?
- 4) Please suggest up to 3 improvements to the evaluation and selection procedure.
- 5) What are the main difficulties/challenges when hosting TNA?
- 6) Are you satisfied with the impact the TNA has on your facility? (1 not satisfied -5 very satisfied)
- 7) Have the TNA outputs stimulated new R&I / increased networking at your facility?

- 8) As a TNA provider what is the most important opportunity created by TNA at your facility/institute.
- 9) Name
- 10) E-mail

### 6.3. Reviewer feedback

AQUAEXCEL 3.0: feedback on TNA experience and recommendations for improvement

This is to obtain feedback and ideas for improvement from reviewers after the initial call for transnational access

- 1) Is your Institute/University a member of AQUAEXCEL 3.0?
- 2) How do you rate the adequacy of information on which the TNA evaluation is based? (1 not satisfied -5 very satisfied)
- 3) How do you rate the guidance and scoring system provided? (1 poor-5 excellent)
- 4) How do you rate the administration of TNA evaluation? (1 poor-5 excellent)
- 5) How appropriate do you find the overall reviewing process? (1 poor-5 excellent)
- 6) Please, suggest up to 3 improvements to the TNA evaluation procedure.
- 7) Name
- 8) E-mail

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